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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000265

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/IRF, DRL/NESCA AND NEA/MAG
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [KIRF](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES EXPELLED FROM MOROCCO;
DISAVOWED BY RESIDENT CHURCHES

REF: A. RABAT 0230
[1](#)B. RABAT 0221

Classified By: POLCOUNS Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Moroccan authorities expelled five expatriate female Christian missionaries from the country Sunday morning for proselytizing and their involvement leading a regular women's Bible study group in Casablanca, according to press and church sources. The Moroccan women in the study group were taken to the local police station, then quietly released without charges. The police were responding to an unrelated complaint from a neighbor and appear to not have been targeting the meeting or missionary activity, according to our source. This is the first time in more than four years that Morocco has publicly expelled formal missionaries from Morocco. Proselytizing is illegal in Morocco, and while the government is clearly unhappy about it, has generally turned a blind eye to activities it is certainly aware of. The local Catholic Archbishop and the head of the authorized Evangelical Church issued a press release disavowing and criticizing proselytizing. The expulsion comes on the heels of a crackdown on Shi,a Muslims earlier this month and publicizing it may have been seen as an opportunity for the GOM to show balance. End summary.

GOM Disbands Bible Study, Expels Missionaries

[1](#)2. (C) Rabat Protestant International Church Pastor Jack Wald (strictly protect) contacted PolOff Sunday morning to report that Moroccan police entered a Casablanca apartment on Saturday evening and arrested a group of 13 Moroccan resident women and 5 expatriate women who were participating in a women's Bible study. The Moroccan women were taken to the police station, questioned and released with no charges brought against them. A female AMCIT who is married to a local Moroccan Christian man was a part of the 13 local women who were questioned and released. The expatriate women (4 from Spain and 1 from Germany) were taken to Tangier, questioned and expelled from Morocco for proselytizing. Wald told PolOff that this is the first time in more than four years that the GOM has taken such action against formal missionary activity.

Bibles Instead of Brassieres

[1](#)3. (C) According to Wald, authorities were called to the Casablanca apartment by concerned citizens who also rented apartments in the same building who suspected immoral activity going on behind closed doors. The apartment where the arrests took place is rented by two male Moroccan Christian leaders who allow it to be used by local Moroccan

Christians for religious meetings. Neighbors became concerned when they saw so many women enter the apartment that was rented by men and notified authorities who arrived expecting to bust a prostitution ring. They were surprised when they found Bibles instead of brassieres and were initially taken aback not knowing what to do. Wald informed PolOff that the Moroccan women were escorted to the local police station where they were politely questioned and discreetly returned in unmarked police cars to their homes. Wald opined that the use of unmarked police cars showed that the authorities were trying to be low-key and not create a big scene.

Church Concern Over Growing GOM Intolerance

¶4. (C) Wald shared with PolOff that although the GOM authorities handled the matter discreetly with the local Moroccan women, he was concerned that the Ministry of Interior decided to make a public statement about the event. Wald said that the GOM could have chosen to handle the entire situation discreetly without much publicity but instead, press reports were rampant throughout the country the next day. "Recent GOM actions against Shi,a Muslims and homosexuals in addition to the actions carried out against the women's Bible Study group on Saturday appear to show a growing intolerance toward other religions and ideas," opined Wald (Ref A).

Proselytizing Illegal in Morocco

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¶5. (C) The Moroccan Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion and the King is the "Commander of the Faithful and the Supreme Representative of the Muslim Community." Non-Muslim foreign communities openly practice their faiths in Morocco. It is, however, illegal to proselytize in Morocco. Yet, there are numerous evangelical Christian groups operating in Morocco, and they are largely left unhindered as long as they refrain from publicly proselytizing and conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations. Those whose religious activities become public face expulsion (Ref B).

No Other Actions against Evangelical Workers

¶6. (C) PolOff contacted representatives from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB) who are working throughout Morocco and asked if they were aware of any other GOM activities targeting their work in the country. IMB representative David Hutton (Protect) informed PolOff that he was not aware of any actions against their people or any other evangelical group at this time but assured us that he would let us know if he hears of anything new.

¶7. (SBU) The heads of the officially authorized Catholic Church and the Chairman of the Evangelical Church of Morocco, Archbishop Vincent Landel and Jean-Luc Blanc respectively, issued a joint press release March 30, noting that they had operated in Morocco for more than a century, disavowing and criticizing proselytizing activities. Their churches concentrate on a dialogue between Muslims and Christians, they wrote, which ruled out proselytizing.

Comment

18. (C) From what we know now, it appears that authorities were not targeting the church or even proselytizing activities but when faced with them felt obliged to react. This event may have provided a convenient opportunity for the GOM to portray a sense of balance, in light of the recent crackdown on Shi,a Muslims, but it clearly avoided an opportunity to act against local Christians. There appears to be a difference of views between the resident Christians, and shorter-term foreign missionaries. The vast majority of Christians in Morocco, even evangelicals, oppose active clandestine proselytizing, fearing it could undermine the relative tolerance that they experience. Post will continue to monitor this situation closely.

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<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Moro> cco

Jackson